

## How to Become a Dog Groomer

**A former hairdresser wants to make the jump to dog grooming professionally.**

*By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG*

Q. I would like to know how to become a dog groomer. Are all those schools really worth it? Some say yes and some say no, that I can learn from books. I also wonder if my past studying as a hairdresser could help me groom the animals. There is a school near my place but it is not government certified. What can I do? I would like to start a home grooming salon.

A. Pet grooming is a wonderful career. I know firsthand that despite the ups and downs of the economy, people take good care of their beloved animals. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the demand for dog groomers will increase 12 percent by 2010. According to the American Pet Products Association (APPA), owners spent \$41.2 billion on their pets in 2007 and that figure for 2008 is estimated at \$43.4 billion. The pet service industry, of which grooming is a major part, is estimated at \$3.2 billion for 2009.

Like you, many groomers come to this profession as a career change. According to PetGroomer.com, a comprehensive online industry information source, there are over 4,000 dogs and cats for every U.S. grooming business and talented groomers have never been more in demand.

As far the cost of grooming school goes, when you contrast it with college or post-graduate vocational training, I think it is quite reasonable. Of course, you must do your homework when it comes to selecting a school. Make sure that the institution you select is approved according to the laws of your state. In my home state, you would contact the Secretary of State's office to make sure the school is in good standing.

"Accreditation" and "state licensing" are two different animals. To achieve accreditation, a school usually has to have been licensed for two years and have met all requirements of the accrediting agency. Their physical plant would have to pass muster as well. Accreditation allows schools to offer financial aid and various governmental programs available to veterans and those qualifying for occupational retraining and rehabilitation programs. Many also offer their own financial aid and loan programs.

For books, I would recommend "Notes from the Grooming Table" by award-winning groomer Melissa Verplank as an invaluable reference guide. She has also headed up her own grooming school, The Paragon School of Pet Grooming in Jenison, Mich., and is currently developing a series of instructional videos on grooming several dog breeds. Many schools, including The Nash Academy of Dog Grooming with locations in Lexington, Ky., and Cliffside Park, N.J., now offer online courses to give students the option of home study as well. Nash requires hands-on training at those facilities and participating salons across the country as part of their diploma program.

I feel strongly that there is no substitute for such supervised practical experience in honing your technical skills and mastering pet handling, but the online component allows you to study from home while working at your current job before you attend school to complete your training. Your experience as a human hair stylist may make the job of scissoring a pet come easier to you when styling pets. Taking some business courses in grooming school or on your own would also help, especially if you plan to start a home-based grooming business. Good luck!